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## THE ENTRANCE OF HAMATH

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One of the most ancient cities of the world is Hamath, superbly situated on the River Orontes at the northern end of the broad valley of Coele-Syria, about 120 miles north of Damascus. In Gen. 10:18 its people are described as Canaanites, who, however, from the proper names discovered in certain inscriptions, must have spoken a Semitic language. For centuries it was probably one of the royal cities of the Hittites. Seven hundred years before Christ it was the seat of an independent kingdom which extended south at least 50 miles, or as far as Riblah (II Kings 23:33; 25:21).

The city was known to the Hebrews as Hamath, which name is perpetuated by the Arabs who call it Hamâ.<sup>1</sup> Josephus knew it by the name Amathe, but states that the Macedonians called it Epiphania—a name probably given to it by Antiochus Epiphanes (176–164 B. C.).<sup>2</sup> Emath or Amath is found in I Macc. 12:25, and also in the writings of early Christian authors. The city at present is estimated to have from sixty to eighty thousand inhabitants. Its altitude is about 1,015 feet above sea-level.

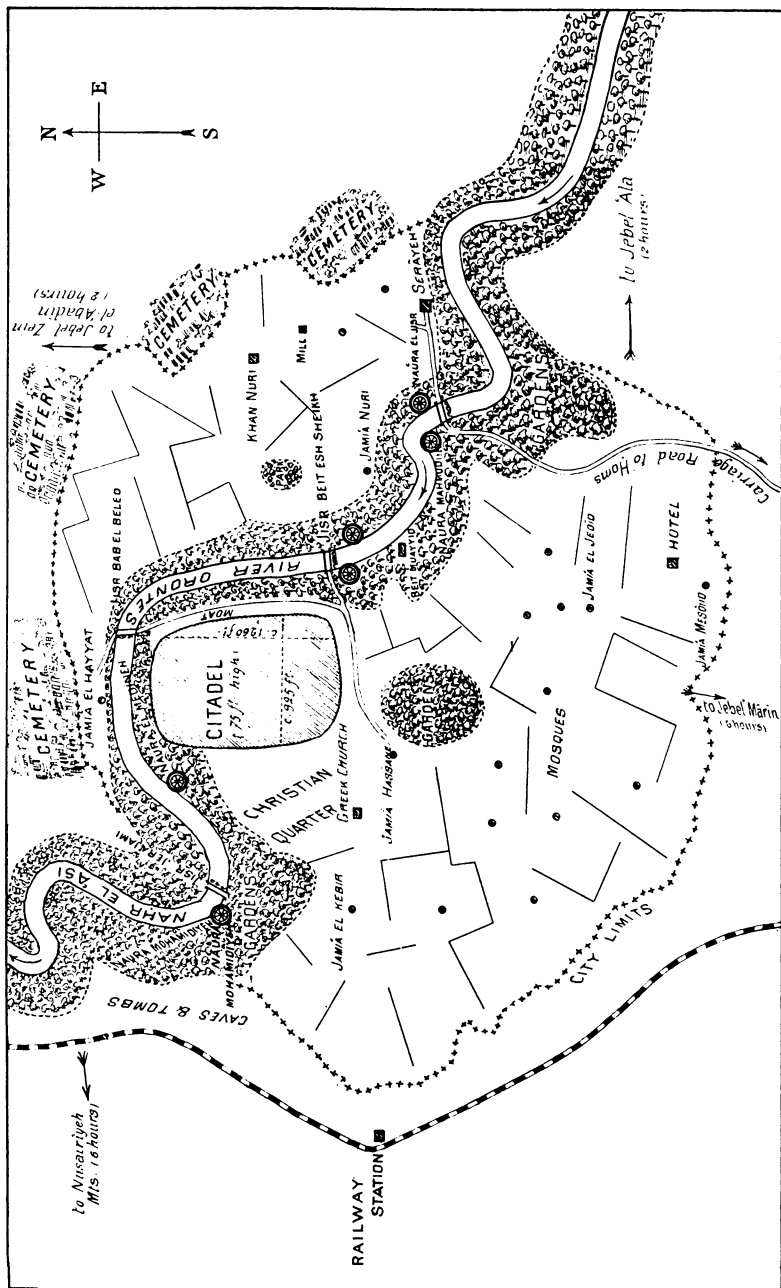
Hamath first engages attention historically in the tenth century B. C., when its king, Toi, sent his son to congratulate David on his victory over Hadadezer, their common enemy (II Sam. 8:10). Solomon a little later is said to have taken (the district of) Hamath and to have built store cities in it (II Chron. 8:3, 4). When the schism under Rehoboam took place its inhabitants evidently took advantage of Israel's crippled condition to regain their independence.

Hamath is frequently mentioned in the Assyrian inscriptions. According to Schrader,<sup>3</sup> Shalmanezar II (854 B. C.) defeated Irhulena,

<sup>1</sup> חמַת, meaning, "fortress" or "sacred inclosure;" once in the A. V. arbitrarily spelled "Hemath" (Amos 6:14); in Arabic حَمَاة.

<sup>2</sup> *Antiq.*, i, 6, 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Keilinschriften und das Alte Testament* (2d ed., 1883), pp. 201 f. (translated under the title *The Cuneiform Inscriptions and the Old Testament*, 1885, 1888).



## PLAN OF HAMATH

the king of Hamath, who had made an alliance with the Hittites and with Benhadad of Damascus, with Ahab of Israel also, and with several other states. Nevertheless, Hamath must have retained its influence and power in the eighth century B. C., for the prophet Amos speaks of it as "Hamath the Great" (6:2). About this time Jeroboam II, one of the strongest of the kings of the Ten Tribes, succeeded in capturing it, with Damascus, bringing it under the



HAMATH CASTLE

hand of Israel (II Kings 14:28). Not long afterward, however, Tiglath-pileser III appeared in the West Land, according to the inscriptions, and forced Hamath's king Eni-îlu (Eniel) to pay tribute to Assyria (740 B. C.). Tiglath-pileser also distributed the land of Hamath among his generals, and transported 1,223 of its choicest inhabitants to the regions of the Upper Tigris.

Shortly after the captivity of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, Hamath joined with the remnant of the Israelites in Samaria in a revolt against Assyria, but the city was quickly retaken by Sargon II

(720 B. C.), who boasts of having humbled its king and of having colonized the land with 4,300 Assyrians. Its defeat at the hands of the Assyrians seems to have made a profound impression upon the prophet Isaiah (10:9); on the other hand, Rabshakeh, the commander-in-chief of Sennacherib's army, repeatedly boasts of Assyria's great victory in taking such a stronghold (II Kings 18:34; 19:13). It appears that colonists were brought by Sargon from Hamath to Samaria (II Kings 17:24, 30), who worshiped the goddess Ashima (the Ishtar or Venus of the Assyrians);<sup>4</sup> and that some of the inhabitants of Samaria were transported to Hamath (Isa. 11:11).

Thereafter Hamath's history becomes merged in that of Damascus, the former having become subordinate to the latter (Jer. 49:23). To Ezekiel, however, Hamath remained a fixed boundary of the territory of the new theocracy (47:17). At Hamath Jonathan met the generals of Demetrius, to prevent their entering the Holy City (I Macc. 12:25). In 639 A. D., Hamath surrendered without resistance to the advancing Muslims under Abu 'Ubeida, who six years later took Damascus. Falling under Muslim domination, Hamath's churches were soon converted into mosques. In the troublous times of the Crusades, Tancred, it is true, succeeded in capturing the city (1108), but it was soon wrested from the Franks by Toghtekin, a Turk (1115). An earthquake shattered it in 1157. In 1178, it fell into the hands of Saladin. In 1310, one of Saladin's descendants, the eminent Arabian scholar, Abulfeda, was appointed prince or governor of the province. He was known as el-Melik el-Muayyad, "the king favored of God." Abulfeda was one of the two most famous citizens Hamath ever produced.<sup>5</sup> Being a geographer, a scientist, and a historian of the highest rank, he attracted to him many of the most eminent scholars of his time. Upon his death in 1331, Hamath's fortunes declined. Today, though the seat of a mutesarraf and of a Turkish garrison, it ranks, in culture and intelligence, little above the ordinary town of Syria and Palestine.

<sup>4</sup> Hebrew tradition suggests that Ashima was "a hairless goat;" or, "a cat to which the ram of the guilt offering was sacrificed;" some have conjectured that Ashima is the same as the Persian *Asman*, heaven; or the Babylonian Tashmetu, the goddess of revelation and wife of Nebo.

<sup>5</sup> The other was the celebrated geographer Yâkût who died in 1229.

Burckhardt visited Hamath in 1812 and describes it as follows:<sup>6</sup>

Hamath is situated on both sides of the Orontes; a part of it is built on the declivity of a hill, and a part in the plain; the quarters in the plain are called Ḥadher and el-Jisr; those higher up el-ʿAleyât and el-Medîneh. Medîneh is the abode of the Christians. . . . In the middle of the city is a square mound of earth, upon which the castle formerly stood; the materials, as well as the stones with which it is probable that the hill was faced, have been carried away and used in the erection of modern buildings. There are four bridges over the



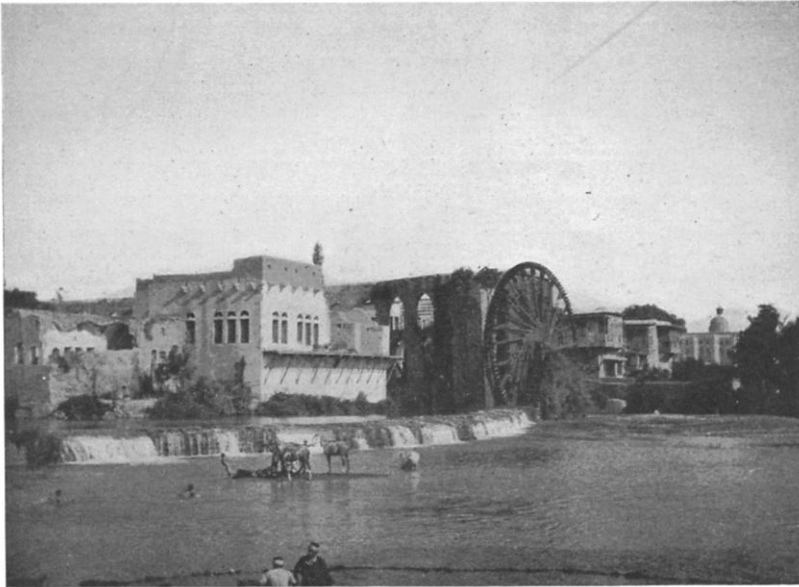
BRIDGE TO THE SERÂYE—HAMATH

Orontes in the town. The river supplies the upper town with water by means of buckets fixed to high wheels (Naʿura) which empty themselves into stone canals, supported by lofty arches on a level with the upper parts of the town. There are about a dozen of the wheels; the largest of them, called Naʿura el-Mohamidiyeh, is at least seventy feet in diameter. The town, for the greater part, is well built, although the walls of the dwellings, a few palaces excepted, are of mud; but their interior makes amends for the roughness of their external appearance.

Burckhardt's description answers almost perfectly the conditions as they exist today. A hundred years have wrought but little

<sup>6</sup> *Travels in Syria and the Holy Land*, 1822, pp. 146 f.

change. Modern Hamath is, indeed, attractive and in some respects picturesque. The River Orontes, which the Arabs call el-*ʿAṣi*, flows through it in curves from southeast to northwest, spanned by four arched stone bridges, which are very handsome. Beautiful and extensive gardens, filled with poplars and all manner of fruit trees (except the orange and lemon) adorn the river's banks north and south, dividing the white city by a broad belt of green. Near the



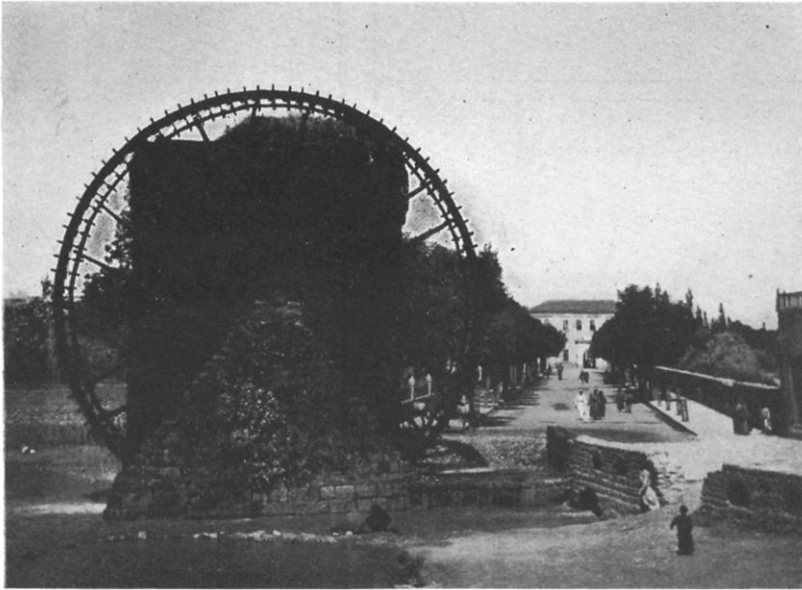
THE LARGEST WHEEL (90 FT.) CALLED NA'URA MOHAMIDÎYEH—HAMATH

middle of the town on its northern side rises the Castle Hill, which the natives declare is wholly artificial. It rises some 75 feet above the surrounding plain. The river is thought originally to have run to the south of this hill, as the old river bed is still distinguishable. A moat one hundred feet broad surrounds its base.

But the most beautiful and characteristic feature of Hamath is the large waterwheels (Na'ura), thought to be of Persian origin, by means of which the gardens are irrigated. Though numerous buckets are attached to them, which raise the water to the high aqueducts into which they discharge themselves, yet the current of the river

is sufficiently strong to turn the immense wheels, and their incessant creaking may be heard day and night.

Hamath is also celebrated for its mosques, many of which are supplied with graceful minarets. There are said to be twenty-four in all. The handsomest is the Jami<sup>c</sup> el-Kebîr, or great mosque; another especially interesting is called the Jami<sup>c</sup> el-Ḥayya, or serpent mosque, because two of its columns are intertwined in a ser-



BRIDGE AND SERÂYE—HAMATH  
Wheel and street leading up to the Serâye or Government Building

entine fashion; under the minaret of the latter is shown the tomb of Abulfeda. The houses are mostly built of sun-dried mud brick with conical roofs; though some of the buildings are constructed with alternating courses of black basalt and white limestone. On the northern side of the town in the low cliffs of the river valley, subterranean cavities, even catacombs and ancient cisterns, are in some instances used as dwellings by the poorer classes. The bazaars are large and quaintly oriental. The chief industry is the manufacture of the ʿAbâyeh or Arabian mantle. Other textiles of less impor-



tance, including leather goods, are also produced, but Hamath's trade is chiefly in mantles with the Bedouin Arabs and the Nusairîyeh. Like all Moslems in inland parts, the people are proud and fanatical; yet among them are to be found gentlemen of culture. The chief physician of the town is Doctor Taufîk Sallum Effendi—a graduate of the Medical Department of the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut—who in gentility and scholarship would grace the



HAMATH FROM CASTLE HILL—LOOKING EAST

most intellectual company of any land. Some possess rich and handsomely furnished houses. Among the most famous are the house of Muayyad Bey, the interior of which is very tastefully decorated, and the palace of the emirs of the Kilâni family. The latter is situated on the right bank of the river near the bridge east of Castle Hill, and is exceedingly ornate.

The best panoramic view of Hamath and its environs is from Castle Hill. In various commentaries and dictionaries of the Bible, the impression is frequently given, even by the most recent writers

upon Hamath, that the city is situated at the mouth of some great break in the mountains, through which the Orontes has forced its way, and that "the entering in of Hamath" means a "narrow pass." On the contrary, the mountains round about Hamath are neither near nor high. In the northeast, six miles away, rises Jebel Zein el-'Abdîn, which is little more than a chain of low hills. Its continuation southward culminates in two low peaks called Jebel Kaisun and Jebel el-'Ala, which last is about due east of the city; the entire range being at least two hours distant from Hamath. On the south, at about the same distance, rises a low chalky isolated peak called Jeben Ma'rin; while on the west fully fifteen miles away are the mountains of the Nusairiyeh. As to topography, instead of occupying a pass, Hamath is situated in a great open rolling plain from twenty to twenty-five miles in breadth, the valley of the river being but a few feet lower than that of the table-land which stretches away in either direction, east, west, north, and south. This fact should be borne in mind as we come now to consider the significance of the phrase "the entrance of Hamath."

The phrase "the entrance of Hamath" occurs in the Old Testament eleven times, and seems to refer in every case to some definite geographical district of Lebanon or North Syria.<sup>7</sup> Whether this phrase means "the approach to Hamath," or, "the entering in of the district of Hamath," we shall best discover from a review of the passages in which the expression is found.

1. According to Num. 13:21, the spies "went up and spied out the land from the wilderness of Zin unto Rehob to *the entrance of Hamath*." Here the author seems to point to a well-known region northward from Rehob; Rehob being situated near Laish or Dan.

2. In Num. 34:8 the northern boundary of Israel is defined as passing "from Mount Hor . . . unto *the entrance of Hamath*; and the goings out of the border shall be at Zedad . . . Ziphron . . . and Hazar-enan." Whether these proper names are better identified with modern Arab places in the extreme northern part of Lebanon and Syria, as Furrer and most writers;<sup>8</sup> or, with others, in

<sup>7</sup> In Hebrew, usually לְבוֹא הָמָת; sometimes with עַד, often with מִן, once with עַד לְכָה preceding.

<sup>8</sup> *Zeitschrift d. deutschen Palaestina-Vereins*, VIII, 27-29.

the extreme southern part of Lebanon and Syria, as Van Kasteren and Buhl,<sup>9</sup> is a question which can scarcely be said to be answered. In the first case, Mount Hor is identified with the northern spur of Lebanon northeast of Tripoli; Zedad is the modern Sadad; Ziphron is the modern Safrâne; Hazar-enan is Karyatén, an oasis about midway between Homs and Palmyra; and "the entrance of Hamath" is the great plain about the modern Restan—the border town between the districts of Homs and Hamath. In the second case, Mount Hor is a peak a few miles northwest of Tell el-Kâdi (Dan); Zedad is Serâda (cf. the LXX) south of Hermon; Hazar-enan is the modern el-Haḍr east of Banias, and "the entrance of Hamath" is Merj 'Ayûn or meadow-plain west of Hermon.

3. According to Josh. 13:5, when Joshua was about to die there remained "yet very much land to be possessed" by Israel, including "the land of the Gebalites and all Lebanon toward the sun rising, from Baal-gad under Mount Hermon unto *the entrance of Hamath*." The entire stretch of the Lebanons seems obviously to be included within these boundaries.

4. According to Judg. 3:3, after the death of Joshua, among the nations left in the land to prove Israel were "the five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites, and the Sidonians, and the Hivites that dwelt in Mount Lebanon from Mount Baal-hermon unto *the entrance of Hamath*." Again the impression seems to be conveyed of a geographical area extending from the base of Hermon northward and including Lebanon and Coele-Syria.

5. According to I Chron. 13:5, after David had captured from the Jebusites the stronghold of Zion, wishing to make it his religious capital, he "assembled all Israel together from the Shihor, the brook of Egypt even unto *the entrance of Hamath*, to bring the ark of God from Kiriath-jearim." The geography of this passage will of course depend upon the meaning of the phrase as determined from other contexts.

6. In I Kings 8:65, it is said that when Solomon had finished the temple he observed the feast of tabernacles, gathering at Jerusalem "a great assembly from *the entrance of Hamath* unto the brook of

<sup>9</sup> *Revue biblique*, 1895, pp. 23 ff.; Buhl, *Geographie des alten Palaestina*, 1896, pp. 10, 66 f.

Egypt." Within these limits the author includes the entire land of Canaan, from the most northern portion to the river of Egypt; i. e., from north Syria to the Wady el-ʿArîsh, a desert stream about half way between Gaza and the northeastern border of Egypt (cf. II Chron. 7:8).

7. In II Kings 14:25, we read that Jeroboam II "restored the border of Israel from *the entrance of Hamath* unto the sea of the ʿArabah, according to the word of Jehovah, the God of Israel, which he spake by his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet who was of Gath-hepher." The territory which is here alluded to was doubtless that portion which had been lost under Jeroboam's predecessors, including Bashan and Gilead and North Syria.

6. When Amos (6:14) describes the full extent of the devastation which shall be wrought by Assyrian invaders, he says: "For behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel, saith Jehovah the God of Hosts; and they shall afflict you from *the entrance of Hamath* unto the brook of the Arabah." As in the previous passages "the entrance of Hamath" is here intended to designate the furthest limit of Israelitish territory on the north.

9. Lastly, Ezekiel (47:20) bounds the holy possessions of the new theocracy, on the west, by "the great sea, from the south border as far as over against *the entrance of Hamath*." From this language it seems reasonable to conclude that to the prophet "the great sea" and "the entrance of Hamath" were closely related geographically (cf. 47:17; 48:1).

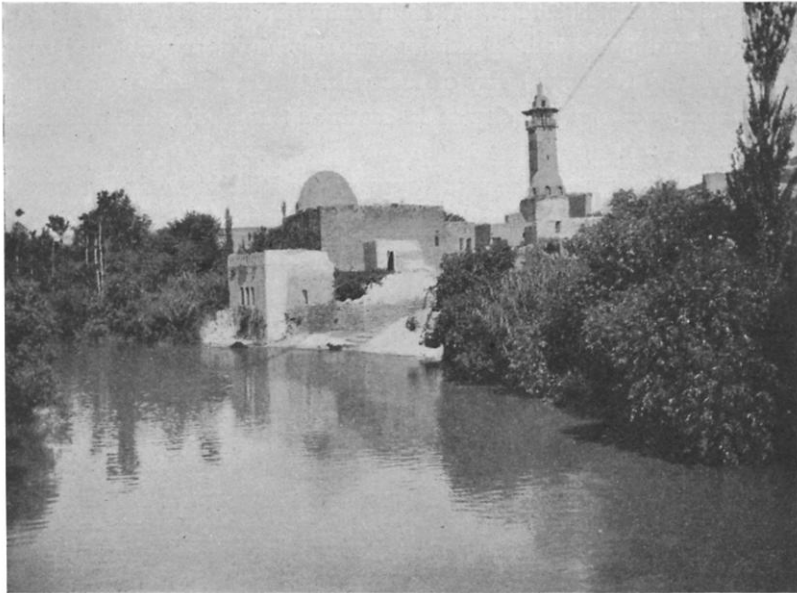
What, in view of these data, is the probable meaning of the phrase "the entrance of Hamath"? and, if the equivalent of a proper name for a definite geographical district, where, then, was it probably located? We must be content with conclusions which are more or less indefinite.

1. In the writer's judgment, the phrase cannot be confined to "the mouth of the pass between the Lebanons a little north of Rehob and Dan (Num. 13:21; cf. Judg. 18:28) which was considered the starting-point of the road to Hamath,"<sup>10</sup> inasmuch as Josh. 13:5 clearly intimates that "the entrance of Hamath" was at some dis-

<sup>10</sup> As Driver on Amos 6:2 in *Cambridge Bible*; G. A. Smith, *The Twelve Prophets*, I, 177; and Buhl, *Geographie des alten Palaestina*, pp. 66, 110.

tance "from Baal-gad under Mount Hermon." The phrase may have come to denote to the Hebrews the long valley of Coele-Syria from south to north, but never was it restricted to the southern entrance only.

2. Neither can it be confined to "the opening between the Nusairiyeh Mountains above Tripoli and the north point of the Lebanon chains;"<sup>11</sup> though the pass which leads westward to Kal'at



THE ORONTES IN HAMATH

el-Ḥoṣn and the Mediterranean may well be included in the phrase (cf. Ezek. 47:20). This is an important pass which leads from the the coast to Ḥoms and Ḥamâ, as the ancient castle of the Kurds which has commanded it for centuries would indicate.

3. Nor should the phrase be restricted to "the low screen of hills which forms the water-shed between the Orontes and the Litâny;"<sup>12</sup> for the northern boundary of Israel's territory was cer-

<sup>11</sup> As Pinches, article "Hamath," in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, II, 290a.

<sup>12</sup> As Rawlinson, article "Hamath," in Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*, II, 986b.

tainly north of Riblah, which lay on their *east* border-line (cf. Num. 34:11).

4. The most probable conclusion, therefore, is, that the phrase "the entrance of Hamath" was a stereotyped expression used by the Hebrews to designate primarily the district round about the city of Hamath on the Orontes in North Syria; that they employed it with some latitude, however, sometimes meaning by it the approach to Hamath;<sup>13</sup> at others, the neighborhood of Hamath, or the great plain which extends southward from Hamath, and at Homs divides eastward and westward. Josephus makes this phrase in II Kings 14:25 refer to the actual city of Hamath.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand the Chronicler speaks of the city of Hamath as though it were a district (II Chron. 8:4).

As the traveler from the south approaches Riblah, he finds himself entering a new region. The broad plain of Homs (thirty miles south of Hamath) opens out before him, and he soon observes that he is geographically at the intersection of four great mountain passes: one on the left connecting the inland region of Coele-Syria with the coast of the Mediterranean Sea; one from the Syrian desert on the east; and the two which stretch indefinitely north and south. This then is "the entrance of Hamath"—the geographical *proper* name of *the great plain which extends southward from Hamath, including the broad interval or depression between the north end of the Lebanon chain and the Nusairîyeh Mountains*. Edward Robinson's view does not differ essentially from ours. He says:

The entering in of Hamath may then refer, either generally to the whole of the great depression, affording as it does an easy passage from the coast to the plain of the Orontes; or, specifically, to the pass through the ridge under el-Husn and the low water-shed east of the Buka' (Coele-Syria); or, more specifically still, only to this low water-shed adjacent to the plain of the Orontes. In either application, the phrase is intelligible and sufficiently definite.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Cf. the kindred phrase in Gen. 13:10, "as thou goest unto Zoar."

<sup>14</sup> *Antiq.*, ix, 10, 1.

<sup>15</sup> *Later Biblical Researches*, III (1872), 569.